

Highland Lighthouse  
Highland Road  
Truro  
Barnstable County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-750

HABS  
MASS,  
1-TRU,  
24-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HIGHLAND LIGHTHOUSE

HABS No. MA-750

Location: Highland Road, Truro, Barnstable County, Massachusetts.  
Present Owner: United States of America.  
Present Occupant: United States Coast Guard.  
Present Use: Lighthouse.  
Significance: Highland Light is the successor to the first lighthouse built in 1797, and is the oldest and tallest lighthouse on Cape Cod.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

HIGHLAND LIGHT

Thoreau, Henry David, Cape Cod (New York and Boston: 1896),  
V, II, 36-57.

Thoreau spent a night at the Highland Light in 1849; he therefore describes the original structure of 1797. The editor includes a footnote explaining "The Lighthouse has since been rebuilt, and shows a Fresnel light."

"The Highland Lighthouse, where we were staying, is a substantial-looking building of brick, painted white, and surmounted by an iron cap. Attached to it is the dwelling of the keeper, one story high, also of brick, and built by the government. As we were going to spend the night in the lighthouse, we . . . told our host that we would like to accompany him when he went to light up . . . he led the way first through his bedroom, which was placed nearest to the lighthouse, and then through a long, narrow, covered passageway, between whitewashed walls like a prison entry, into the lower part of the lighthouse, where many great butts of oil were arranged around; thence we ascended by a winding and open iron stairway . . . to a trap-door in an iron floor, and through this into the lantern . . . to a trap-door in an iron floor, and through this into the lantern . . . The light consisted of fifteen argand lamps, placed within smooth concave reflectors twenty-one inches in diameter, and arranged in two horizontal circles one above the other, facing every way excepting directly down the Cape. These were surrounded, at a distance of two or three feet, by large plate-glass windows . . . with iron sashes, on which rested the iron cap. All the iron work, except the floor, was painted white. And thus the lighthouse was completed.

CAPE COD LIGHTHOUSES

Notes taken by E. A. Connally in Wellfleet, July-August 1959.

Kittredge, Henry C., Cape Cod: Its People and their History,  
(Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin., 1930).

p. 310 " . . . throughout its entire colonial history, the Cape had not a single lighthouse . . . and though for fourteen years after we became independent, sailors had to steer by the stars alone in skirting Monomoy and Peaked Hill Bars, yet once they began, our Congressmen kept on voting money for lighthouses until the coast was adequately illuminated.

The first to be built on the Cape was Highland Light. Its foundations were laid in 1797 on what the Reverend Levi Whitman of Wellfleet called 'a mountain which is of solid clay in Truro.' It stood unchanged while two generations of sailors kept a safe offing on even the darkest nights. Then in 1857 it was rebuilt into one of the foremost lighthouses of the world, a position which it has held ever since. Its 182,000 candle-power lantern is unequalled by any other oil burner on this continent.

p. 311 It was soon evident that the varied maritime activities of New England were a source of great profit to the country. Everything that aided navigation was therefore encouraged in Congress, and another lighthouse was put up in 1816 at Race Point, back of Provincetown. It is now gone as it is completely under water. The fact that the next to appear (1822) was on Billingsgate Island, at the entrance to Wellfleet Harbor, shows clearly what the government thought of the Bay shore fisheries. This light and its nearest neighbor on the Bay, built at Sandy Neck, Barnstable, four years later, guided the destinies of fishermen and packet captains through the busy decades that followed . . . these two lights still blink reminiscently . . .

In 1823, the Government took a grant to a piece of beach grass and sand on Monomoy Point and later erected a lighthouse which showed Chatham fishermen the way home and which, with the Great Point Light on Nantucket, gave coastwise vessels a crossbearing through the dangerous water of the Sound. Georges Bankers were guided in safety around the very tip of the Cape by the Long Point Light, which made its appearance in 1826. A dozen years later . . . three lighthouses were put up on Nauset Beach about a mile north of the entrance to the Harbor. These, with the twin lights of Chatham, and a smaller one at Hyannis, handed vessels on from lighthouse to lighthouse all the way from the Nobsque Point Beacon at Falmouth (built 1828) to deep water beyond Peaked Hill Bars and the Race. The old stone tower on Point Gammon went out of business when Bishop and Clark's was put up three miles south of it on a ledge in the Sound. Two others were erected somewhat gratuitously, one at Pamet Harbor, Truro, in 1849 and the other at Wood End, Provincetown, in 1873. The former was discontinued after six years, when the harbor silted up to a mere creek; but Wood End still fills the gap between the Race and Long Point."

CAPE COD LIGHTHOUSES

About Cape Cod (Boston, 1936), p. 81.

Name	Location	Top of Lantern above ground	Structure:	
			Estab.	Rebuilt
Long Point	SW side of entrance to Provincetown	37' White square tower	1827	1875
Wood End	On beach near the Provincetown Entrance	39' White pyramidal tower	1872	1872
Race Point	On NW point of Cape Cod	40' White tower	1816	1876
Cape Cod (Highland Light)	On highlands on NE side of Cape	66' White tower, covered connecting walkway to dwelling.	1778	1857
<p>Oldest and tallest light house on Cape Cod.            Successor to first light house on Cape Cod.            Light is 183' above water.</p>				
Nauset Beach	On beach at Eastham, East side of Cape.	48' White conical tower	1839	1923
Chatham	On W side of Chatham Harbor	48' White conical tower	1808	1877
Bishop and Clerks	On N part of ledge off Hyannis	65' Gray granite tower	1858	----
Nobska Point	Point E of entrance to Woods Hole Harbor	40' White tower	1829	1876
Wing's Neck	Buzzard's Bay	- Hexagonal tower, covered connecting walkway to dwelling.	1849	1889

For "3 sisters" and Billingsgate Light

See: Eastham, Massachusetts, 1651-1951

(by Eastham Tercentenary Committee, 1951), p.69.

Old photos of lighthouses are now gone.

CAPE COD LIGHTHOUSES

Jeremiah Digges, Cape Cod Skipper (Provincetown, 1937), pp. 220-221.

Light house now standing at High Land was built in 1847, replacing an earlier structure. Up to 1931 it burned oil, now with electricity installed it burns a single 1000-Watt bulb of 2500 candle-power. The huge bulls-eye lenses stretch this out to the equivalent of four billion candle power. It can be seen for twenty miles under normal conditions.

Highland Light

Shebnah Rich, Truro Cape Cod or Landmarks and Seemarks (Boston, 1884) p. 204 . . . "When Isaac Small, the grandfather of Thomas fields and I. Morton Small, sold the Government the Lighthouse site, it embraced ten acres. Since then (1797) . . ."

Highland Light, North Truro

Simeon L. Deyo, History of Barnstable County, Massachusetts (N.Y. 1890) p. 950. "I. Morton Small, born in 1846, is a son of James and Jerusha (Hughes) Small, grandson of Isaac, great-grandson of Francis and great-great-grandson of Samuel Small. He has been marine telegraph operator at the Highland station since 1860. He has owned the Highland House since 1873, having succeeded his father, who had kept a summer boarding house for eleven years. He married Sarah E., daughter of John Small."

Captain Winslow Lewis (1770-1850) see D.A.B.

Author. Description of the Lighthouses on the Coast of the United States. (Boston, 1817).

Invented: "Patent Lamps and Reflectors."

Winslow Lewis, Review of the Report of I.W.P. Lewis on the State of the Lighthouse on the coast of Maine and Massachusetts (Boston, 1843).

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